



Rwanda Symposium -Policy Advocacy Capacity Building Workshop Concept

Background

Founded in 2006, Sonke Gender Justice (Sonke) is a human rights organization that is committed to feminist principles, using a rights-based and gender transformative approach to achieve human rights and gender justice. Sonke works across Africa to strengthen government, civil society and citizen capacity to promote gender equality, prevent domestic and sexual violence, and reduce the spread and impact of HIV and AIDS. Sonke is the secretariat of the MenEngage Africa alliance.

Introduction

In the past years significant advocacy work has been done by MEA to address harmful gender norms as well as policy gaps that impact on girls, women, boys and men's ability to fully enjoy their rights. Policy advocacy is an important component of the work that Sonke and MenEngage Africa do. It enables Sonke and the Alliance to influence laws, policies and institutions addressing gender inequality and sexual and gender-based violence which remains perverse across the continent. For instance, as a result of MEA's advocacy work there is evidence that governments are more willing to engage MEA networks in terms of either amending legislation or proposing policies around issues such as ending early child marriages (ECM) in countries like Tanzania and Namibia. MEA members of these two countries have participated in a review of the Draft Marriage Regime Bill.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) MEA network has also been involved in advocacy around new laws related to ECM. Whilst in Kenya, the network contributed towards the development of the Draft National HIV and AIDS Male Engagement Guideline. In Zambia the network has been actively involved in advocating for laws and policies to criminalise gender based violence (GBV). Various MEA network members continue to be actively involved in advocacy initiatives in their countries.

At a regional level, Sonke and MEA have engaged the Pan African Parliament (PAP) parliamentarians on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) and they have in turn committed to developing a national action plan on FGM/C in each of their parliaments where

this is not already in place. Meanwhile, MEA has also engaged with the East African Community (EAC) on the same issues. In the past MEA together with other civil society organisations participated to influence the debate (and language) around gender issues in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the United Nations Human Rights Council. While significant strides have been made through enacting policies to address, gender inequality, human rights and GBV at national, regional and international level, implementation remains a challenge.

While many definitions have been provided, policy advocacy can also be defined as any effort to influence public policy and practice or any other decisions of institutional elite (GrantCraft 2005, Jenkins 2006, Casey and Dalton 2006). It encompasses a wide range of activities that influence decision makers. These include traditional activities such as litigation, lobbying, and public education. It can also include capacity building, relationship building, forming networks, and leadership. Advocacy activities may be aimed directly at the decision makers or they may seek to influence indirectly through shaping public opinion or by disseminating alternative models of policy and practices. While advocacy is primarily seen as seeking to influence government and the public sector, it can also focus on promoting changes in the private sector.

Encouraging citizen involvement in policy decisions is key in holding governments accountable to citizens. Nonprofit organizations can play a crucial role in this regard. NGOs play a vital role in the development and implementation of public policy to promote an informed, healthy, and strong democratic society. Due to their proximity to communities, NGOs can be a bridge between policy makers and their constituents. They can help communities be better positioned to place a demand on policy and decision makers to address their concerns and needs through enacting laws and policies as well as effectively implementing them. They can also assist policy makers to be more aware of the needs and challenges faced by communities as well as assist with implementation of policies.

Purpose of the Event

The objective of the event is to capacitate MEA Alliance members and other NGOs on policy advocacy at the national, regional and international level and how to hold governments accountable to uphold human rights commitments as provided for under regional and international instruments. The capacity building workshop will also focus on how to hold governments accountable on their reporting obligations under regional and international institutions and instruments particularly those that speak directly to the work of MEA and similar minded organisations such as SDGs, CEDAW, Maputo Protocol and Agenda 2063.

The capacity building will unpack what policy advocacy is and why it is important, spaces for advocacy and target groups for advocacy. The training will also address international and regional advocacy including spaces to advocate , how to engage with regional and international human rights spaces and how to engage with states reporting processes and prepare shadow reports.

In the recent years we have witnessed increased civic engagement on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube and these now offer a new frontier for civic participation. Citizens are now able to connect and engage with their governments in real time to demand accountability and facilitate community actions.

Training Methodology

The Policy Advocacy capacity building workshop is a 2 day training program which will employ a blended design including facilitation, experience simulated practical activities & group discussions. The first day will address what advocacy and particularly policy advocacy is, why it is important for Civil Society organizations to do it as well as how to engage with policy advocacy mechanisms at national level.

On the second day training will focus on understanding the International human rights system and how to engage with it to advocate for human rights, equality and gender justice. It will also build capacity of partners on how to engage with human rights accountability mechanism including shadow reports and oral statements. The session will also be used for networking and developing a strategy on how to engage with multi-lateral institutions as a Network.

The training will be conducted by the secretariat of MEA Sonke in partnership with MenEngage Global.

Expected Outcomes

1. An understanding of what policy Advocacy is and the different levels at which it can be carried out.
2. An understanding of the regional and international human rights system and how to advocate for human rights, gender justice and equality at that level.
3. An understanding on how to engage with human rights accountability mechanisms including shadow reports and oral statements
4. A commitment by MEA Alliance and a strategy on how to engage with human rights accountability mechanisms going forward.